



National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

Death Valley National  
Park

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## Death Valley News Release

Release: **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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### Public Notice:

### **Notice of Intent to Prepare an Environmental Assessment and Request for Public Scoping Comments for the Air Tour Management Plan Program at Death Valley National Park**

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), in cooperation with the National Park Service (NPS), has initiated development of an Air Tour Management Plan (ATMP) and associated Environmental Assessment (EA) for Death Valley National Park (hereafter referred to simply as Death Valley), pursuant to the National Parks Air Tour Management Act of 2000.

Seven air tour operators currently provide commercial air tours over and within ½ mile of Death Valley. Most of these tours originate out of Las Vegas, though a minority originate from the Sacramento and Reno/Tahoe area. Since January of 2003, these 7 operators have had authority to conduct a maximum combined total of 67 air tours per year, though in recent years, operations have been below this level. While the air tour visitor experience varies depending on weather conditions and the desires of the air tour client, the primary attractions for air tour visitors are Badwater, Scotty's Castle, Ubehebe Crater, the Racetrack, and the rugged expanse and geologic features of the Park. Since most of the operators fly some distance to arrive at the Park, a stop at Furnace Creek to refresh is a common offering by most operators; this stop also allows passengers the unique experience of flying and landing below sea level.

An ATMP is being developed to provide measures to mitigate or prevent significant adverse impacts, if any, of commercial air tour operations at Death Valley, including impacts on natural and cultural resources, visitor experiences, and tribal lands within or around the park. It should be noted that the ATMP has no authorization over other non-air-tour operations such as military and general aviation operations. The Death Valley ATMP will be prepared using an Aviation Rulemaking Committee (ARC) process. The purpose of using the ARC process is to provide early advice, information, and recommendations from interested stakeholders to the FAA and NPS, regarding environmental and other issues to consider in the development of an ATMP. The Death Valley ARC is composed of various representatives including air tour operators, federal, local and regional agencies, environmental organizations, local businesses, and the Timbisha Shoshone tribe. It is chaired by the Park Superintendent, Sarah Craighead.

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In June 2009, the ARC held a two-day kickoff meeting at Death Valley; minutes may be found at:

[http://www.faa.gov/about/office\\_org/headquarters\\_offices/arc/programs/air\\_tour\\_management\\_plan/park\\_specific\\_plans/Death\\_Valley.cfm](http://www.faa.gov/about/office_org/headquarters_offices/arc/programs/air_tour_management_plan/park_specific_plans/Death_Valley.cfm)

The purpose of the kickoff meeting was for stakeholders to have the opportunity to provide advice, information, and recommendations to the FAA and NPS regarding environmental and other issues to consider in the development of an ATMP. Materials presented at the meeting included information on: park resources; the acoustical environment at Death Valley; military operations over Death Valley and the surrounding areas; current and historical air tour operations; and, a map of current air tour flight paths. Comments were received from members of the ARC regarding sensitive park resources, tribal concerns, changes in tourism patterns, and air tour operations. After a generalized map of current air tour flight paths was presented, ARC members made suggestions regarding options for an air tour flight track that would consolidate flight paths and modify elevations and flight locations. ARC members' recommendations attempted to address the concerns raised at the meeting. Refer to the Public Scoping Document (mentioned below) to see how these suggestions are incorporated into an air tour route.

Based on input received at the meeting, the FAA and NPS have decided to proceed with ATMP development at Death Valley via the ARC process. The FAA and NPS are now inviting the public, agencies, and other interested parties to provide comments, suggestions, and input regarding the Death Valley ATMP. The agencies would like to know about any concerns or ideas the public has regarding commercial air tour operations at Death Valley and their management. Questions to consider when providing input include: Are there any significant issues the agencies need to consider during the planning process? How do you feel air tours will affect natural, cultural, and historic resources at Death Valley?

A Public Scoping Document that describes the project in greater detail is available at:

- The NPS Planning, Environment and Public Comment System at:  
<http://parkplanning.nps.gov/projectHome.cfm?parkId=297&projectId=27781>
- [http://www.faa.gov/about/office\\_org/headquarters\\_offices/arc/programs/air\\_tour\\_management\\_plan/park\\_specific\\_plans/Death\\_Valley.cfm](http://www.faa.gov/about/office_org/headquarters_offices/arc/programs/air_tour_management_plan/park_specific_plans/Death_Valley.cfm)
- The following locations within Death Valley National Park: Furnace Creek Visitor Center & Museum, Stovepipe Wells Ranger Station, Scotty's Castle
- Shoshone Museum, Shoshone, CA
- Eastern Sierra Interagency Center, Highway 395 and Highway 136, Lone Pine, CA
- Beatty Library District, 400 North 4<sup>th</sup> Street, Beatty, NV
- Inyo County Free Library: 168 North Edwards Street, Independence, CA; 210 Academy Street and 110 North Main Street in Bishop, CA
- Pahrump Community Library: 701 East Street, Pahrump, NV
- Amargosa Valley Library: 829 East. Farm Road, Amargosa Valley, NV

## **SUBMITTING COMMENTS:**

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Written comments on the scope of the Environmental Assessment should be sent electronically via the electronic public comment form on the NPS Planning, Environment and Public Comment System at:

<http://parkplanning.nps.gov/projectHome.cfm?parkId=297&projectId=27781>. All comments must be submitted within 30 days of date of this notice.

Comments may also be submitted to Keith Lusk (Air Tour Management Plan Program Manager, Special Programs Staff, AWP-1SP, FAA) via mail (P.O. Box 92007, Los Angeles, California 90009-2007) or email ([Keith.Lusk@faa.gov](mailto:Keith.Lusk@faa.gov)).

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